

THE
FATAL CURIOSITY.

A
TRAGEDY
OF
THREE ACTS.
WITH
ALTERATIONS.

As it is Performed at the
THEATRE in SMOCK-ALLEY.

WRITTEN by Mr. LILLO.

D U B L I N :

Printed by and for Messrs. ADAMS and RYDER,
in *Cope-Street*;

And Sold by P. WILSON, Bookseller, in *Dame-Street*.

MDCC LXVI.



Dramatis Personæ.

M E N.

OLD WILMOT,	Mr. MOSSOP.
YOUNG WILMOT,	Mr. RYDER.
RANDAL,	Mr. WILDER.
EUSTACE,	Mr. JEFFERYS.

W O M E N.

AGNES, Wife to OLD	} Mrs. JEFFERYS.	
WILMOT,		
CHARLOT,		Miss HERN.
MARIA,		Mrs. PEARSON.

SCENE, PENRYN in CORNWALL.

FATAL CURIOSITY.

SCENE I.

A Room in WILMOT'S House.

OLD WILMOT alone.

THE day is far advanced ; the chearful sun
Pursues with vigour his repeated course ;
No labour lessning, nor no time decaying
His strength, or splendor : Evermore the same,
From age to age his influence sustains
Dependent worlds, bestows both life and motion
On the dull mass that forms their dusky orbs,
Cheers them with heat, and gilds them with his brightness.
Yet man, of jarring elements composed,
Who passes from change to change, from the first hour
Of his frail being till his dissolution,
Enjoys the sad prerogative above him,
To think, and to be wretched — What is life,
To him that's born to die ! or what that wisdom
Whose perfection ends, in knowing we know nothing !
Meer contradiction all ! A tragic farce,

B

Tedious

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Tedious tho' short, and without art elab'rate,
Ridiculously sad ———

Enter RANDAL.

Where hast been, Randal?

RANDAL.

Not out of Penryn, sir; but to the strand,
To hear what news from Falmouth since the storm
Of wind last night.

OLD WILMOT.

It was a dreadful one.

RANDAL.

Some found it so. A noble ship from India
Ent'ring in the harbour, run upon a rock,
And there was lost.

OLD WILMOT.

What came of those on board her?

RANDAL.

Some few are saved, but much the greater part,
'Tis thought, are perished.

OLD WILMOT.

They are past the fear
Of future tempests, or a wreck on shore;
Those who escaped, are still exposed to both.

RANDAL.

But I've heard news, much stranger than this shipwreck
Here in Cornwall. The brave Sir Walter Raleigh,
Being arrived at Plymouth from Guiana,
A most unhappy voyage, has been betray'd
By base Sir Lewis Stukeley, his own kinsman,
And seiz'd on by an order from the court;
And 'tis reported, he must lose his head,
To satisfy the Spaniards.



OLD

The FATAL CURIOSITY.

OLD WILMOT.

Not unlikely;
His martial genius does not suit the times.
There's now no insolence that Spain can offer,
But to the shame of this pacifick reign,
Poor England must submit to — Gallant man!
Posterity perhaps may do thee justice,
And praise thy courage, learning and integrity,
When thou'rt past hearing: Thy successful enemies,
Much sooner paid, have their reward in hand,
And know for what they labour'd — Such events
Must, questionless, excite all thinking men,
To love and practise virtue!

RANDAL.

Nay; 'tis certain,
That virtue ne'er appears so like it itself,
So truly bright and great as when oppress'd.

OLD WILMOT.

I understand no Riddles. — Where's your Mistress?

RANDAL.

I saw her pass the High-street t'wards the minster.

OLD WILMOT.

She's gone to visit Charlot—She doth well,
In the soft bosom of that gentle maid,
There dwells more goodness, than the rigid race
Of moral pedants, e'er believ'd, or taught,
With what amazing constancy and truth,
Doth she sustain the absence of our son,
Whom more than life she loves! How shun for him,
Whom we shall ne'er see more, the rich and great?
Who own her charms more than supply the want
Of shining heaps, and sigh to make her happy.

The FATAL CURIOSITY.

Since our misfortunes, we have found no friend,
None who regarded our distress, but her;
And she, by what I have observed of late,
Is tired, or exhausted — curst condition!
To live a burden to one only friend,
And blast her youth with our contagious woe!
Who that had reason, soul, or sense would bear it
A moment longer! — Then this honest wretch! —
I must dismiss him — Why should I detain,
A grateful, gen'rous youth to perish with me?
His service may procure him bread elsewhere,
Tho' I have none to give him. — Prithee, Randal!
How long hast thou been with me?

RANDAL.

Fifteen years.

I was a very child when first you took me,
To wait upon your son, my dear young master!
I oft have wish'd, I'd gone to India with him;
Tho' you, desponding, give him o'er for lost.

[OLD WILMOT *wipes his eyes.*]

I am to blame — This talk revives your sorrow
For his absence.

OLD WILMOT.

How can that be reviv'd,
Which never died?

RANDAL.

The whole of my intent
Was to confess your bounty, that supplied

The loss of both my parents: I was long

The object of your charitable care.

OLD WILMOT.

No more of that: Thou'lt served me longer since
Without reward; so that account is balanced,

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The FATAL CURIOSITY.

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Or rather I'm thy debtor ——— I remember;
When poverty began to show her face
Within these walls, and all my other servants,
Like pamp'ring vermin from a falling house,
Retreated with the plunder they had gain'd,
And left me, too indulgent and remiss
For such ungrateful wretches, to be crush'd
Beneath the ruin they had helped to make,
That you, more good than wise, refused to leave me.

RANDAL.

Nay, I beseech you, sir! ———

OLD WILMOT.

With my distress,
In perfect contradiction to the world,
Thy love, respect and diligence increased;
Now all the recompence within my power,
Is to discharge thee, Randal, from my hard,
Unprofitable service.

RANDAL.

Heaven forbid!
Shall I forsake you in your worst necessity? ———
Believe me, sir! my honest soul abhors
The barb'rous thought.

OLD WILMOT.

What! canst thou feed on air?
I have not left wherewith to purchase food
For one meal more.

RANDAL.

Rather than leave you thus,
I'll beg my bread, and live on others bounty
While I serve you.

OLD WILMOT.

Down, down my swelling heart,

Or

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Or burst in filence: 'Tis thy cruel fate
 Insults thee by his kindness — He is innocent
 Of all the pain it gives thee — Go thy ways —
 I will no more suppress thy youthful hopes
 Of rising in the world.

RANDAL,

'Tis true; I'm young,
 And never tried my fortune, or my genius;
 Which may perhaps find out some happy means,
 As yet unthought of, to supply your wants.

OLD WILMOT.

Thou tortur'st me — I hate all obligations
 Which I can ne'er return — And who art thou,
 That I shou'd stoop to take 'em from thy hand!
 Care for thy self. but take no thought for me;
 I will not want thee — trouble me no more.

RANDAL.

Be not offended, sir! and I will go.
 ne'er repined at your commands before;
 But, heaven's my witness! I obey you now
 With strong reluctance, and a heavy heart,
 Farewel, my worthy master!

[Going.]

OLD WILMOT.

Farewel — Stay —
 As thou art yet a stranger to the world,
 Of which alas! I've had too much experience,
 I shou'd methinks, before we part, bestow
 A little counsel on thee — Dry thy eyes —
 If thou weep'st thus, I shall proceed no farther.
 Dost thou aspire to greatness, or to wealth,
 Quit books and the unprofitable search
 Of wisdom there, and study human kind;
 No science will avail thee without that,

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But that obtain'd, thou need'st not any other.

This will instruct thee to conceal thy views,
And wear the face of probity and honour,
'Till thou hast gain'd thy end; which must be ever
Thy own advantage, at that man's expence
Who shall be weak enough to think thee honest.

RANDAL.

You mock me, sure.

OLD WILMOT.

I never was more serious.

RANDAL.

Why should you counsel what you scorned to practise?

OLD WILMOT.

Because that foolish scorn has been my ruin,
I've been an idiot, but would have thee wiser,
And treat mankind, as they would treat thee, Randal,
As they deserve and I've been treated by 'em.
Thou'st seen by me, and those who now despise me,
How men of fortune fall, and beggars rise;
Shun my example; treasure up my precepts;
The world's before thee—be a knave, and prosper.
What art thou dumb? *[After a long pause.]*

RANDAL.

Amazement ties my tongue.

Where are your former principles?

OLD WILMOT.

No matter;

Suppose I have renounced 'em: I have passions,
And love thee still; therefore would have thee think,
The world is all a scene of deep deceit,
And he who deals with mankind on the square,
Is his own bubble, and undoes himself. *[Exit.]*

RANDAL.

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RANDAL.

Is this the man, I thought so wise and just?
 What teach, and counsel me to be a villain!
 Sure grief has made him frantick, or some fiend
 Assum'd his shape — I shall suspect my senses.
 High-minded he was ever, and improvident;
 But pitiful and generous to a fault:
 Pleasure he loved, but honour was his idol.
 O fatal change! O horrid transformation!
 So a majestic temple sunk to ruin,
 Becomes the loathsome shelter and abode
 Of lurking serpents, toads, and beasts of prey;
 And scaly dragons hiss, and lions roar,
 Where wisdom taught, and music charm'd before.

SCENE II.

A parlour in CHARLOT's house.

Enter CHARLOT and MARIA.

What terror and amazement must they feel
 Who die by ship-wreck!

MARIA.

'Tis a dreadful thought!

CHARLOT.

Ay; is it not, Maria! to descend,
 Living and conscious, to that wat'ry tomb?
 Alas! had we no sorrows of our own,
 The frequent instance, of others woe,
 Must give a gen'rous mind a world of pain,
 But you forget you promised me to sing.
 Tho' cheerfulness and I have long been strangers,

Harmonious

The FATAL CURIOSITY.

Harmonious sounds are still delightful to me.
 There is in melody a secret charm—
 That flatters, while it adds to my disquiet,
 And makes the deepest sadness the most pleasing.
 There's sure no passion in the human soul,
 But finds its food in music—I wou'd hear
 The song compos'd by that unhappy maid,
 Whose faithful lover 'scap'd a thousand perils
 From rocks, and sands, and the devouring deep;
 And after all, being arriv'd at home,
 Passing a narrow brook, was drowned there,
 And perished in her sight.

S O N G.

Mar. *Cease, cease, heart-easing tears;*

Adieu, you flatt'ring fears,

Which seven long tedious years,

Taught me to bear.

Tears are for lighter woes;

Fear no such danger knows,

As fate remorseless shows,

Endless despair.

Dear cause of all my pain,

On the wide stormy main,

Thou wast preserved in vain,

Thou still adored.

Had'st thou died there unseen,

My blasted eyes had been

Saved from the horrid'st scene.

Maid e'er deplored.

[Charlot finds a letter]

CHARLOT.

What's this? — A letter superscrib'd to me!
None could convey it here but you, Maria.
Ungen'rous, cruel maid! to use me thus!
To join with flatt'ring men to break my peace,
And persecute me to the last retreat!

MARIA.

Why should it break your peace, to hear the sighs
Of honourable love, and know th' effects
Of your resistless charms? This letter is —

CHARLOT.

No matter whence — return it back unopen'd;
I have no love, no charms but for my Wilmot,
Nor would have any.

MARIA.

Strange infatuation!
Why should you waste the flower of your days
In fruitless expectation — Wilmot's dead;
Or living, dead to you.

CHARLOT.

I'll not despair,
Patience shall cherish hope, nor wrong his honour
By unjust suspicion. I know his truth,
And will preserve my own. But to prevent
All future, vain, officious importunity,
Know, thou incessant foe of my repose,
Whether he sleeps secure from mortal cares,
In the deep bosom of the boist'rous main,
Or tost with tempests, still endures its rage;
Whether his weary pilgrimage by land
Has found an end, and he now rests in peace
In earth's cold womb, or wanders o'er her face;
Is it my lot to waste, in pining grief,

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The FATAL CURIOSITY. II

The remnant of my days for his known loss,
Or live, as now, uncertain and in doubt,
No second choice shall violate my vows :
High heav'n, which heard them, and abhors the perjur'd,
Can witness, they were made without reserve ;
Never to be retracted, ne'er dissolved
By accidents or absence, time or death.

MARIA.

I know, and long have known, my honest zeal
To serve you gives offence — But be offended —
This is no time for flatt'ry — Did your vows
Oblige you to support his gloomy, proud,
Impatient parents, to your utter ruin —
You well may weep to think on what you've done.

CHARLOT.

I weep to think that I can do no more
For their support — What will become of 'em ? —
The hoary, helpless, miserable pair !

MARIA.

Then all these tears, this sorrow is for them.

CHARLOT.

Taught by afflictions, I have learn'd to bear
Much greater ills than poverty with patience.
When luxury and ostentation's banish'd,
The calls of nature are but few ; and those
These hands, not us'd to labour, may supply.
But when I think on what my friends must suffer,
My spirits fail, and I'm o'erwhelm'd with grief.

MARIA.

What I wou'd blame, you force me to admire,
And mourn for you, as you lament for them.

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Your patience, constancy, and resignation
Merit a better fate.

CHARLOT.

So pride would tell me,
And vain self-love, but I believe them not:
And if by wanting pleasure I have gained
Humility, I'm richer for my loss.

MARIA.

You have the heavenly art, still to improve
Your mind by all events—But here comes one,
Whose pride seems to encrease with her misfortunes.
Her faded dress unfashionably fine,
As ill conceals her poverty, as that
Strain'd complaisance her haughty, swelling heart.
Tho' perishing with want, so far from asking,
She ne'er receives a favour uncompelled,
And while she ruins, scorns to be obliged:
She wants me gone, and I abhor her sight. [Exit MAR.

Enter AGNES.

CHARLOT.

This visit's kind.

AGNES.

Few else would think it so:
Those who would once have thought themselves much ho-
By the least favour, tho' 'twere but a look, [pour'd
I could have shewn them, now refuse to see me.
'Tis misery enough to be reduced
To the low level of the common herd,
Who born to begg'ry envy all above them;
But 'tis the curse of curses, to endure
The insolent contempt of those we scorn.

CHARLOT.

By scorning, we provoke them to contempt;

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And thus offend, and suffer in our turns !
We must have patience.

AGNES.

No, I scorn them yet.
But there's no end of suffering : Who can say
Their sorrows are compleat ? My wretched husband,
Tired with our woes, and hopeless of relief,
Grows sick of life.

CHARLOT.

May gracious heaven support him !

AGNES.

And, urged by indignation and despair,
Would plunge into eternity at once,
By foul self-murder : His fixed love for me,
Whom he would fain persuade to share his fate,
And take the same, uncertain, dreadful course,
Alone withholds his hand.

CHARLOT.

And may it ever !

AGNES.

I've known with him the two extremes of life,
The highest happiness, and deepest woe,
With all the sharp and bitter aggravations
Of such a vast transiion ——— Such a fall
In the decline of life ! ——— I have as quick,
As exquisite a sense of pain as he,
And wou'd do any thing, but die, to end it ;
But there my courage fails — Death is the worst
That fate can bring, and cuts off ev'ry hope.

CHARLOT.

We must not chuse, but strive to bear out lot
Without reproach, or guilt : But by one act
Of desperation, we may overthrow,

The

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The merit we've been raising all our days ;
And lose our whole reward——And now, methinks,
Now more than ever, we have cause to fear,
And be upon our guard. The hand of heaven
Spreads clouds on clouds o'er our benighted heads,
And wrap'd in darkness, doubles our distress.
I had, the night last past, repeated twice,
A strange and awful dream : I would not yield
To fearful superstition, nor despise
The admonition of a friendly power
That wish'd my good.

AGNES,

I've certain plagues enough,
Without the help of dreams, to make me wretched.

CHARLOT,

I wou'd not stake my happiness or duty
On their uncertain credit, nor on aught
But reason, and the known decrees of heaven.
Yet dreams have sometimes shewn events to come,
And may excite to vigilance and care,
In some important hour ; when all our weakness
Shall be attack'd, and all our strength be needful,
To shun the gulph that gapes for our destruction,
And fly from guilt, and everlasting ruin.
My vision may be such, and sent to warn us,
Now we are tried by multiplied afflictions,
To mark each motion of our swelling hearts,
And not attempt to extricate ourselves,
And seek deliverance by forbidden ways :
But keep our hopes and innocence entire,
'Till we're dismiss'd to join the happy dead
In that bless'd world, where transitory pain
And frail imperfect virtue, is rewarded

With

With endless pleasure and consummate joy ;
Or heaven relieves us here.

AGNES.

Well, pray proceed ;
You've rais'd my curiosity at least.

CHARLOT.

Methought, I sat, in a dark winter's night,
My garments thin, my head and bosom bare,
On the wide summit of a barren mountain ;
Defenceless and expos'd, in that high region,
To all the cruel rigors of the season.
The sharp, bleak winds pierc'd thro' my shiv'ring frame,
And storms of hail, and fleet, and driving rains
Beat with impetuous fury on my head,
Drench'd my chill'd limbs, and pour'd a deluge round me.
On one hand, ever-gentle patience sat,
On whose calm bosom I reclin'd my head ;
And on the other, silent contemplation
At length, to my unclos'd and watchful eyes,
That long had roll'd in darkness, and oft' rais'd
Their chearless orbs towards the starless sky,
And sought for light in vain, the dawn appear'd
And I beheld a man, an utter stranger,
But of a graceful and exalted mein,
Who press'd with eager transport to embrace me,
(shunn'd his arms — But at some words he spoke,
Which I have now forgot, I turn'd again,
But he was gone — And oh ! transporting sight !
Your son, my dearest Wilmot ! fill'd his place.

AGNES.

If I regarded dreams, I should expect
Some fair event from yours : I have heard nothing
That should alarm you yet.

CHARLOT

CHARLOT.

But what's to come,
 Tho' more obscure, is terrible indeed.
 Methought, we parted soon, and when I sought him,
 You and his father — Yes, ye both were there —
 Strove to conceal him from me: I pursued
 You with my cries, and call'd on heaven and earth
 To judge my wrongs, and force you to reveal
 Where you had hid my love, my life, my Wilmot! —

AGNES.

Unless you mean t' affront me, spare the rest.
 'Tis just as likely Wilmot should return,
 As we become your foes.

CHARLOT.

Far be such rudeness from Charlott's thoughts:
 But when I heard you name self-murder,
 It reviv'd the frightful image of such a dreadful scene.

AGNES.

You will persist! —

CHARLOT.

Excuse me; I have done. Being a dream,
 I thought, indeed, it could not give offence.

AGNES.

Not when the matter of it is offensive! —

You cou'd not think so, had you thought at all;

But I take nothing ill from thee: — Adieu!

I've tarried longer than I first intended,

And my poor husband mourns the while alone. [Exit

CHARLOT.

She's gone abruptly, and I fear displeas'd.

The least appearance of advice or caution,

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Sets her impatient temper in a flame.
When grief, that well might humble, swells our pride,
And pride increasing, aggravates our grief,
The tempest must prevail 'till we are lost.

When heaven, incens'd, proclaims unequal war
With guilty earth, and sends its shafts from far.
No bolt descends to strike, no flame to burn
The humble shrubs that in low valleys mourn ;
While mountain pines, whose lofty heads aspire
To fan the storm, and wave in fields of fire,
And stubborn oaks that yield not to its force,
Are burnt, o'erthrown, or shiver'd in its course.

S C E N E III.

The town and port of Penryn.

Enter YOUNG WILMOT *and* EUSTACE, *in Indian*
habits.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Welcome, my friend ! to Penryn : here we're safe.

EUSTACE.

Then we're deliver'd twice ; first from the sea,
And then from savage men, who, more remorseless,
Prey on shipwreck'd wretches, and spoil and murder those
Whom fatal tempests and devouring waves,
In all their fury, spar'd.

YOUNG WILMOT.

It is a scandal,
Tho' malice must acquit the better sort,
The rude unpolish'd people here in Cornwall
Have long lain under, and with too much justice :
Could our superiors find some happy means

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To mend it, they would gain immortal honour;
For 'tis an evil grown almost inveterate,
And asks a bold and skilful hand to cure.

EUSTACE.

Your treasure's safe, I hope.

YOUNG WILMOT.

'Tis here, thank heaven!
Being in jewels, when I saw our danger,
I hid it in my bosom.

EUSTACE.

I observ'd you,
And wonder how you could command your thoughts;
In such a time of terror and confusion.

YOUNG WILMOT.

My thoughts were then at home—O England! England!
Thou seat of plenty, liberty, and health,
With transport I behold thy verdant fields,
Thy lofty mountains rich with useful ore,
Thy numerous herds, thy flocks, and winding streams:
After a long and tedious absence, Eustace!
With what delight we breathe our native air,
And tread the genial soil that bore us first.
'Tis said, the world is ev'ry wise man's country;
Yet, after having view'd its various nations,
I'm weak enough still to prefer my own
To all I've seen beside—You smile, my friend!
And think, perhaps, 'tis instinct more than reason:
Why be it so. Instinct preceded reason
In the wisest of us all, and may sometimes
Be much the better guide. But be it either;
I must confess, that even death itself
Appeared to me with twice its native horrors,
When apprehended in a foreign land.
Death is, no doubt, in ev'ry place the same;

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The FATAL CURIOSITY. 19

Yet observation must convince us, most men,
Who have it in their power, chuse to expire
Where they first drew their breath.

EUSTACE.

Believe me, Wilmot!

Your grave reflections were not what I smil'd at;

I own their truth. That we're return'd to England

Affords me all the pleasure you can feel

Merely on that account: Yet I must think

A warmer passion gives you all this transport.

You have not wander'd, anxious and impatient,

From clime to clime, and compass'd sea and land

To purchase wealth, only to spend your days

In idle pomp, and luxury at home:

I know thee better: Thou art brave and wise,

And must have nobler aims.

YOUNG WILMOT.

O Eustace! Eustace!

Thou know'st, for I've confess'd to thee, I love;

But having never seen the charming maid,

Thou canst not know the fierceness of my flame:

My hopes and fears, like the tempestuous seas

That we have past, now mount me to the skies,

Now hurl me down from that stupendous height,

And drive me to the centre. Did you know

How much depends on this important hour,

You wou'd not be surpriz'd to see me thus.

The sinking fortune of our ancient house,

Which time and various accidents had wasted,

Compell'd me young to leave my native country,

My weeping parents, and my lovely Charlot;

Who rul'd, and must for ever rule my fate.

How I've improv'd, by care and honest commerce,

My little stock, you are in part a witness.
 'Tis now seven tedious years, since I set forth;
 And, as th' uncertain course of my affairs
 Bore me from place to place, I quickly lost
 The means of corresponding with my friends.
 —Oh! shou'd my Charlot! doubtful of my truth,
 Or in despair ever to see me more,
 Have given herself to some more happy lover! —
 Distraction's in the thought! — Or shou'd my parents,
 Griev'd for my absence and oppress'd with want,
 Have sunk beneath their burden, and expir'd,
 While I too late was flying to relieve them;
 The end of all my long and weary travels,
 The hope, that made success itself a blessing,
 Being defeated and for ever lost;
 What were the riches of the world to me?

EUSTACE.

The wretch who fears all that is possible,
 Must suffer more than he who feels the worst
 A man can feel, who lives exempt from fear.
 A woman may be false, and friends are mortal,
 And yet your aged parents may be living,
 And your fair mistress constant.

YOUNG WILMOT.

True, they may;
 I doubt, but I despair not; — No, my friend;
 My hopes are strong and lively as my fears,
 And give me such a prospect of my happiness,
 As nothing but fruition can exceed:
 They tell me, Charlot is as true as fair,
 As good as wise, as passionate as chaste;
 That she with fierce impatience, like my own,
 Laments our long and painful separation;

Tha

The FATAL CURIOSITY.

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That we shall meet, never to part again ;
That I shall see my parents, kiss the tears
From their pale hollow cheeks, cheer their sad hearts,
And drive that gaping phantom, meagre want,
For ever from their board ; crown all their days
To come, with peace, with pleasure, and abundance ;
Receive their fond embraces and their blessings,
And be a blessing to 'em.

EUSTACE.

'Tis our weakness,
Blind to events, we reason in the dark,
And fondly apprehend what none e'er found,
Or ever shall, pleasure and pain unmix'd ;
And flatter, and torment ourselves, by turns,
With what shall never be.

YOUNG WILMOT.

I'll go this instant
To seek my Charlot, and explore my fate.

EUSTACE.

What in that foreign habit !

YOUNG WILMOT,

That's a trifle,
Not worth my thoughts.

EUSTACE.

The hardships you've endur'd,
And your long stay beneath the burning zone,
Where one eternal sultry summer reigns,
Have marr'd the native hue of your complexion :
Methinks you look more like a sun-burnt Indian,
Than a Briton.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Well 'tis no matter, Eustace !
I hope my mind's not alter'd for the worse ;

Tha

And

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And for my outside — But inform me, friend !
When I may hope to see you.

EUSTACE:

When you please
You'll find me at the inn.

YOUNG WILMOT.

When I have learnt my doom, expect me there.
Till then, farewell !

EUSTACE:

Farewel ! Success attend you !

(Exit. EUST.)

YOUNG WILMOT.

“ We flatter, and torment ourselves, by turns,
“ With what shall never be.” Amazing folly !
We stand expos'd to many unavoidable
Calamities, and therefore fondly labour
T' increase their number, and inforce their weight,
By our fantastic hopes and groundless fears.

For one severe distress impos'd by fate,
What numbers doth tormenting fear create ?
Deceiv'd by hope, Ixion like, we prove
Immortal joys, and seem to rival Jove ;
The cloud dissolv'd, impatient we complain,
And pay for fancied bliss substantial pain.

End of the FIRST ACT.

ACT

ACT II. SCENE I.

CHARLOT'S house.

Enter CHARLOT *thoughtful*; and soon after, MARIA
from the other side.

MARIA.

MADAM, a stranger in a foreign habit
Desires to see you.

CHARLOT.

In a foreign habit —

'Tis strange and unexpected—But admit him. *Exit. MAR.*
Who can this stranger be? I know no foreigner.

Enter YOUNG WILMOT.

—Nor any man like this.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Ten thousand joys! — (*Going to embrace her.*)

CHARLOT.

You are rude, sir — Pray forbear, and let me know
What business brought you here, or leave the place.

YOUNG WILMOT.

She knows me not, or will not seem to know me (*Aside.*)
Perfidious maid! Am I forgot or scorn'd?

CHARLOT.

Strange questions from a man I never knew!
With what aversion and contempt she views me!
My fears are true; some other has her heart:

—She's lost—My fatal absence has undone me. (*Aside.*)

—O! cou'd thy Wilmot have forgot thee, Charlot?

CHARLOT.

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CHARLOT.

Ha! Wilmot! say! what do your words import?
O gentle stranger! ease my swelling heart
That else will burst! canst thou inform me ought? —
What dost thou know of Wilmot?

YOUNG WILMOT.

This I know,
When all the winds of heaven seem'd to conspire
Against the stormy main, and dreadful peals
Of rattling thunder deafen'd ev'ry ear,
And drown'd th' affrighten'd mariners loud cries;
While livid light'ning spread its sulphurous flames
Thro' all the dark horizon, and disclos'd
The raging seas incens'd to his destruction;
When the good ship in which he was embark'd,
Unable longer to support the tempest,
Broke, and o'erwhelm'd by the impetuous surge,
Sunk to the oozy bottom of the deep,
And left him struggling with the warring waves;
In that dread moment, in the jaws of death,
When his strength fail'd, and every hope forsook him,
And his last breath press'd t'wards his trembling lips,
The neighbouring rocks that eccho'd to his moan,
Return'd no sound articulate, but Charlot.

CHARLOT.

The fatal tempest, whose description strikes
The hearer with astonishment, is ceas'd;
And Wilmot is at rest. The fiercer storm
Of swelling passions that o'erwhelms the soul,
And rages worse than the mad foaming seas
In which he perish'd, ne'er shall vex him more.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Thou seem'st to think he's dead; enjoy that thought;

Perseuade

Persuade yourself that what you wish is true,
 And triumph in your falshood — Yes, he's dead;
 You were his fate. The cruel winds and waves,
 That cast him pale and breathless on the shore,
 Spar'd him for greater woes — To know his Charlot,
 Forgetting all her vows to him and heaven,
 Had cast him from her thoughts — Then, then he died;
 But never must have rest. Ev'n now he wanders,
 A sad, repining, discontented ghost,
 The unsubstantial shadow of himself,
 And pours his plaintive groans in thy deaf ears,
 And stalks, unseen, before thee

CHARLOT.

'Tis enough —
 Detested falshood now has done its worst.
 And art thou dead? — And wou'd'st thou die, my Wilmot!
 For one thou thought'st unjust? — Thou soul of truth!
 What must be done? — Which way shall I express
 Unutterable woe? Or how convince
 Thy dear departed spirit of the love,
 Th' eternal love, and never-failing faith
 Of thy much injur'd, lost, despairing Charlot!

YOUNG WILMOT.

Be still, my flutt'ring heart; hope not too soon:
 Perhaps I dream, and this is all illusion.

CHARLOT.

If, as some teach the mind intuitive,
 Free from the narrow bounds and slavish ties
 Of sordid earth that circumscribe its power
 While it remains below, roving at large,
 Can trace us to our most conceal'd retreat,
 See all we act, and read our very thoughts,
 To thee, O Wilmot! kneeling I appeal,

E

If e'er I swerv'd in action, word, or thought,
 From the severest constancy and truth,
 Or ever wish'd to taste a joy on earth
 That center'd not in thee, since last we parted;
 May we ne'er meet again, but thy loud wrongs
 So close the ear of mercy to my cries,
 That I may never see those bright abodes
 Where truth and virtue only have admission,
 And thou inhabit'st now.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Assist me, heaven!
 Preserve my reason, memory and sense!
 O moderate my fierce tumultuous joys,
 Or their excess will drive me to distraction.
 O Charlot! Charlot! lovely, virtuous maid!
 Can thy firm mind, in spite of time and absence,
 Remain unhaken, and support its truth;
 And yet thy frailer memory retain
 No image, no idea of thy lover?
 Why dost thou gaze so wildly? Look on me;
 Turn thy dear eyes this way; observe me well.
 Have scorching climates, time, and this strange habit,
 So chang'd, and so disguis'd thy faithful Wilmot,
 That nothing in my voice, my face, or mien,
 Remains to tell my Charlot I am he?

*[After viewing him some time, she approaches weeping
 and gives him her hand; and then turning toward
 him, sinks upon his bosom.]*

Why dost thou weep? Why dost thou tremble thus?
 Why doth thy panting heart and cautious touch
 Speak thee but half convinc'd? Whence are thy fears?
 Why art thou silent? Canst thou doubt me still?

CHARLOT

CHARLOTTE

No, Wilmot! no; I'm blind with too much light;
O'ercome with wonders, and oppress'd with joy,
The struggling passions barr'd the doors of speech;
But speech enlarg'd, affords me no relief.

This vast profusion of extream delight,
Rising at once, and bursting from despair,
Defies the aid of words, and mocks description:
But for one sorrow, one sad scene of anguish,
That checks the swelling torrent of my joys,
I could not bear the transport.

YOUNG WILMOT

Let me know it:

Give me my portion of thy sorrow, Charlot!

Let me partake thy grief, or bear it for thee.

CHARLOTTE

Alas! my Wilmot! these sad tears are thine;

They flow for thy misfortunes. I am pierced

With all the agonies of strong compassion,

With all the bitter anguish you must feel,

When you shall hear your parents——

YOUNG WILMOT

Are no more.

CHARLOTTE

You apprehend me wrong.

YOUNG WILMOT

Perhaps I do:

Perhaps you mean to say, the greedy grave

Was satisfied with one, and one is left

To bless my longing eyes.—— But which, my Charlot!

——And yet forbear to speak, 'till I have thought——

CHARLOTTE

Nay, hear me, Wilmot!

YOUNG WILMOT,

I perforce must hear thee.
 For I might think 'till death, and not determine,
 Of two so dear, which I could bear to lose.

CHARLOT.

Afflict yourself no more with groundless fears:
 Your parents both are living. Their distress,
 The poverty to which they are reduc'd,
 In spite of my weak aid, was what I mourn'd;
 And that in helpless age, to them whose youth
 Was crown'd with full prosperity, I fear,
 Is worse, much worse, than death.

YOUNG WILMOT.

My joy's compleat!
 My parents living, and possess'd of thee! —
 From this blest hour, the happiest of my life,
 I'll date my rest. My anxious hopes and fears,
 My weary travels, and my dangers past,
 Are now rewarded all: Now I rejoice
 In my success, and count my riches gain.
 For know, my soul's best treasure, I have wealth
 Enough to glut ev'n avarice itself.
 No more shall cruel want, or proud contempt,
 Oppress the sinking spirits, or insult
 The hoary heads of those who gave me being.

CHARLOT.

'Tis now, O riches, I conceive your worth;
 You are not base, nor can you be superfluous,
 But when misplac'd in base and sordid hands.
 Fly, fly, my Wilmot! leave thy happy Charlotte!
 Thy filial piety, the sighs and tears
 Of thy lamenting parents call thee hence.

YOUNG WILMOT.

I have a friend, the partner of my voyage,
Who, in the storm last night, was shipwreck'd with me.

CHARLOT.

Shipwreck'd last night! — O ye immortal pow'rs!
What have you suffer'd! How was you preserv'd?

YOUNG WILMOT.

Let that, and all my other strange escapes
And perilous adventures, be the theme
Of many a happy winter night to come.
My present purpose was t^e intreat my angel,
To know this friend, this other better Wilmot;
And come with him this evening to my father's:
I'll send him to thee.

CHARLOT.

I consent with pleasure,

YOUNG WILMOT.

Heav'ns! what a night! — How shall I bear my joy!
My parents, your's, my friends, all will be mine,
And mine, like water, air, or the free splendid sun,
The undivided portion of you all.
If such the early hopes, the vernal bloom,
The distant prospect of my future bliss,
Then what the ruddy autumn! — What the fruit?
The full possession of thy heavenly charms!

The tedious, dark, and stormy winter o'er;
The hind, that all its pinching hardships bore,
With transport sees the weeks appointed bring
The chearful, promis'd, gay, delightful spring;
The painted meadows, the harmonious woods,
The gentle zephyrs, and unbridled floods;

THE FATAL CURIOSITY.

With all their charms, his ravish'd thoughts employ,
But the rich harvest must compleat his joy.

SCENE II.

A STREET in PENRYN.

Enter RANDAL.

Poor ! poor ! and friendless ! whither shall I wander,
And to what point direct my views and hopes ? —
A menial servant ! — No, — What shall I live,
Here in this land of freedom, live distinguish'd,
And mark'd the willing slave of some proud subject,
And swell his useless train for broken fragments ;
The cold remains of his superfluous board ? —
I wou'd aspire to something more and better —
Turn thy eyes then to the prolific ocean,
Whose spacious bosom opens to thy view :
There deathless honour, and unenvy'd wealth,
Have often crown'd the brave adventurer's toils.
This is the native uncontested right,
The fair inheritance of ev'ry Briton
That dares put in his claim — My choice is made :
A long farewell to Cornwall, and to England ;
If I return — But stay, what stranger's this,
Who, as he views me, seems to mend his pace ?

Enter YOUNG WILMOT.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Randal ! — The dear companion of my youth !
Sure lavish fortune means to give me all
I could desire, or ask for this blest day,
And leave me nothing to expect hereafter

RANDAL.

Your pardon, sir ! I know But one on earth

Could

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Could properly salute me by the title
You're pleased to give me, and I would not think,
That you are he—That you are Wilmot. —

YOUNG WILMOT.

Why?

RANDAL.

Because I cou'd not bear the disappointment
Shou'd I be deceived.

YOUNG WILMOT.

I am pleased to hear it :
Thy friendly fears better express thy thoughts
Than words could do.

RANDAL.

O ! Wilmot ! O ! my master !
Are you return'd ?

YOUNG WILMOT.

I have not yet embrac'd
My parents — I shall see you at my father's.

RANDAL.

No, I'm discharg'd from thence — O, sir ! such ruin —

YOUNG WILMOT.

I've heard it all, and hasten to relieve 'em :
Sure heav'n hath blest'd me to that very end :
I've wealth enough ; nor shalt thou want a part.

RANDAL.

I have a part already — I am blest
In your success, and share in all your joys.

YOUNG WILMOT.

I doubt it not — But tell me, dost thou think,
My parents not suspecting my return,
That I may visit them, and not be known ?

RANDAL.

'Tis hard for me to judge. You are already
Grown so familiar to me, that I wonder

I knew

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I knew you not at first: Yet it may be;
For you're much alter'd, and they think you dead.

YOUNG WILMOT.

This is certain; Charlot beheld me long,
And heard my loud reproaches and complaints,
Without rememb'ring she had ever seen me.
My mind at ease grows wanton: I wou'd fain
Refine on happiness. Why may I not
Indulge my curiosity, and try
If it be possible, by seeing first
My parents as a stranger, to improve
Their pleasure by surprize?

RANDAL.

It may indeed

Inhance your own, to see from what despair
Your timely coming, and unhop'd success
Have given you power to raise them.

YOUNG WILMOT.

I remember,
E'er since we learn'd together, you excell'd
In writing fairly, and could imitate
Whatever hand you saw with great exactness.
Of this I'm not so absolute a master,
I therefore beg you'll write in Charlot's name
And character, a letter to my father:
And recommend me, as a friend of her's,
To his acquaintance.

RANDAL.

Sir, if you desire it——

And yet——

YOUNG WILMOT.

Nay, no objections—'Twill save time,
Most precious with me now. For the deception,
If doing what my Charlot will approve,

'Cause

Cause done for me and with a good intent,
Deserves the name, I'll answer it myself.
If this succeeds, I purpose to defer
Discov'ring who I am 'till Charlot comes,
And thou, and all who love me, ev'ry friend
Who witness my happiness to night,
Will, by partaking, multiply my joys.

RANDAL.

You grow luxurious in your mental pleasures:
Could I deny you aught, I would not write
This letter. To say true, I ever thought
Your boundless curiosity a weakness.

YOUNG WILMOT.

What canst thou blame in this?

RANDAL.

Your pardon, Sir!

I only speak in general: I'm ready

T' obey your orders.

YOUNG WILMOT.

I am much thy debtor,

But I shall find a time to quit my kindness

O Randal! but imagine to thyself

The floods of transport, the sincere delight

That all my friends will feel, when I disclose

To my astonish'd parents my return;

And then confess, that I have well contriv'd

By giving others joy t' exalt my own.

As pain, and anguish, in a gen'rous mind,

While kept conceal'd, and to ourselves confin'd,

Want half their force; so pleasure, when it flows

In torrents round us, more extatic grows.

[Exeunt.]

F

SCENE

SCENE II.

A room in OLD WILMOT's house.

OLD WILMOT and AGNES.

Here, take this Seneca, this haughty pedant,
 Who governing the master of mankind,
 And awing power imperial, prates of — patience;
 And praises poverty — possess'd of millions :
 — Sell him, and buy us bread. The scantiest meal
 The vilest copy of his book e'er purchas'd,
 Will give us more relief in this distress,
 Than all his boasted precepts. — Nay, no tears;
 Keep them to move compassion when you beg.

AGNES.

My heart may break, but never stoop to that.

OLD WILMOT.

Nor would I live to see it — But dispatch.

[Exit AGNES]

Where must I charge this length of misery,
 That gathers force each moment as it rolls,
 And must at last o'erwhelm me ; but on hope,
 Vain, flattering, delusive, groundless hope ;
 A senseless expectation of relief
 That has for years deceiv'd me ? — Had I thought
 As I do now, as wise men ever think,
 When first this hell of poverty o'ertook me,
 That power to die implies a right to do it,
 And shou'd be us'd when life becomes a pain,
 What plagues had I prevented ? — True, my wife
 Is still a slave to prejudice and fear —
 I would not leave my better part, the dear

Faithful

THE FATAL CURIOSITY.

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Faithful companion of my happier days,
To bear the weight of age and want alone.

[Weeps.]

Enter AGNES, and after her YOUNG WILMOT.

OLD WILMOT.

Return'd, my life, so soon!—

AGNES.

The unexpected coming of this stranger
Prevents my going yet.

YOUNG WILMOT.

You're, I presume,

The gentleman to whom this is directed

[Gives a letter.]

What wild neglect, the token of despair,

What indigence, what misery appears

In each disorder'd, or disfurnish'd room

Of this once gorgeous house? What discontent;

What anguish and confusion fill the faces

Of its dejected owners?

[Aside.]

OLD WILMOT.

Sir, such welcome

As this poor house affords, you may command.

Our ever friendly neighbour—Once we hop'd

T' have call'd fair Charlot by a dearer name

But we have done with hope—We had once a son [Weeps.]

Excuse this incoherence—

AGNES.

That you are come from that dear virtuous maid,

Revives in us the mem'ry of a loss,

Which, tho' long since, we have not learn'd to bear.

YOUNG WILMOT.

The joy to see them, and the bitter pain

It is to see them thus, touches my soul

With tenderness and grief, that will o'erflow.

My bosom heaves and swells, as it would burst;

— They know me not, and yet, I fear, I shall
Defeat my purpose, and betray myself [Aside]

OLD WILMOT.

The lady calls you here her valu'd friend ;
Enough, tho' nothing more should be imply'd,
To recommend you to our best esteem,
— A worthless acquisition ! — May she find
Some means that better may express her kindness ;
But she, perhaps, hath purpos'd to enrich
You with herself, and end her fruitless sorrow
For one whom death alone, can justify
For leaving her, so long. If it be so,
May you repair his loss, and be to Charlot
A second, happier Wilmot. Partial nature,
Who only favours youth, as feeble age
Were not her offspring or below her care,
Has seal'd our doom ! No second hope shall spring
To dry our tears and dissipate despair.

AGNES.

The last and most abandon'd of our kind,
By heaven and earth neglected or despis'd,
The loathsome grave that robb'd us of our son,
And all our joys in him, must be our refuge.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Let ghosts unpardon'd, or devoted fiends,
Fear without hope, and wail in such sad strains ;
But grace defend the living from despair.
The darkest hours precede the rising sun ;
And mercy may appear, when least expected.

OLD WILMOT.

This I have heard a thousand times repeated,
And have, believing, been as oft deceiv'd.

YOUNG

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YOUNG WILMOT.

Behold in me an instance of its truth.
At sea twice shipreck'd, and as oft' the prey
Of lawless pirates; by the Arabs thrice
Surpriz'd, and robb'd on shore; and once reduc'd
To worse than these, the sum of all distress
That the most wretched feel on this side hell,
Ev'n slavery itself: Yet here I stand,
Except one trouble that will quickly end,
The happiest of mankind.

OLD WILMOT.

A rare example of the caprice of fortune!
Of fortune's caprice; apter to surprize
Or entertain, than comfort or instruct.
If you would reason from events, be just,
And count, when you escap'd, how many perish'd;
And draw your inf'rence thence,

AGNES.

Alas! who knows,
But we were render'd childless by some storm,
In which you, tho' preserv'd, might bear a part.

YOUNG WILMOT.

How has my curiosity betray'd me
Into superfluous pain! I faint with fondness;
And shall, if I stay longer, rush upon 'em,
Proclaim myself their son, kiss, and embrace 'em,
Till their souls, transported with the excess
Of pleasure and surprize, quit their frail mansions,
And leave 'em breathless in my longing arms.
By circumstances then and slow degrees,
They must be let into a happiness
Too great for them to bear at once, and live:
That Charlot will perform: I need not feign
To ask an hour for rest. (*Aside.*) Sir, I intreat

ACT

Th

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The favour to retire where, for a while,
I may repose myself. You will excuse
This freedom, and the trouble that I give you;
Tis long since I have slept, and nature calls.

OLD WILMOT.

I pray no more: Believe we're only troubl'd,
That you shou'd think any excuse were needful, [Exit,

YOUNG WILMOT.

The weight of this is some incumbrance to me.

[Takes a casket out of his bosom, and gives it to his mother.]

And its contents of value: If you please
To take the charge of it, 'till I awake,
I shall not rest the worse. If I should sleep
Till I'm ask'd for, as perhaps I may,
I beg that you wou'd wake me.

AGNES.

Doubt it not:

Distracted as I am with various woes,

I shall remember that. [Exit,

YOUNG WILMOT.

Merciless grief!

What ravage has it made! how has it chang'd

Her lovely form and mind! I feel her anguish,

And dread I know not what from her despair.

My father too — O grant 'em patience, heaven!

A little longer, a few short hours more,

And all their cares, and mine, shall end for ever,

How near is misery and joy ally'd!

Nor eye, nor thought, can their extremes divide:

A moment's space is long, and lightning slow,

To fate descending to reverse our woe,

Or blast our hopes, and all our joys o'erthrow. [Exit.]

End of the SECOND ACT.

ACT

ACT III. SCENE I.

The SCENE continued.

Enter AGNES alone, with a casket in her hand.

WHO should this stranger be?—and then this casket—

He says it is of value, and yet trusts it,
As if a trifle, to a stranger's hand——
His confidence amazes me—Perhaps
It is not what he says—I'm strongly tempted
To open it, and see——No, let it rest;
Why should my curiosity excite me,
To search and pry into th' affairs of others;
Who have t' employ my thoughts, so many cares
And sorrows of my own?—With how much ease
The spring gives way?—Surprizing! most prodigious!—
My eyes are dazzl'd, and my ravish'd heart
Leaps at the glorious sight—How bright's the lustre,
How immense the worth of these fair jewels?
Ay, such a treasure wou'd expel for ever
Base poverty, and all its abject train;
The mean devices we're reduc'd to use
To keep out famine, and preserve our lives
From day to day; the cold neglect of friends;
The galling scorn, or more provoking pity
Of an insulting world —— Possess'd of these,
Plenty, content, and power might take their turn,
And lofty pride bare its aspiring head
At our approach, and once more bend before us.
——A pleasing dream!—'Tis past; and now I wake
More wretched by the happiness I've lost.

The FATAL CURIOSITY.

But wherefore lost?
For sure it was a happiness to think,
Tho' but a moment, such a treasure mine.
Nay, it was more than thought—I saw and touch'd
The bright temptation, and I see it yet——
'Tis here—'tis mine—I have it in possession——
——Must I resign it? Must I give it back?
Am I in love with misery and want?——
To rob myself, and court so vast a loss?——
——Retain it then——But how?——There is a way——
Why sinks my heart? Why does my blood run cold?
Why am I thrill'd with horror?——'Tis not choice;
But dire necessity suggests the thought.

Enter OLD WILMOT.

The mind contented, with how little pains
The wand'ring senses yield to soft repose,
And die to gain new life? He's fall'n asleep
Already——Happy man!——What dost thou think,
My Agnes, of our unexpected guest?
He seems to me a youth of great humanity:
Just e're he clos'd his eyes, that swam in tears,
He wrung my hand, and press'd it to his lips;
And with a look, that pierc'd me to the soul,
Begg'd me to comfort thee: And——Dost thou hear me?
What art thou gazing on——Fie, 'tis not well——
This casket was deliver'd to you clos'd:
Why have you open'd it? Shou'd this be known,
How mean must we appear?

AGNES:

And who shall know it?

OLD WILMOT.

There is a kind of pride, a decent dignity
Due to ourselves; which, spite of our misfortunes,

May

May be maintain'd, and cherish'd to the last.
To live without reproach, and without leave
To quit the world, shews sov'reign contempt,
And noble scorn of its relentless malice.

AGNES.

Shews sovereign madness, and a scorn of sense.
Pursue no farther this detested theme:
I will not die, I will not leave the world
For all that you can urge, until compell'd.

OLD WILMOT.

How vain th' anxiety for fleeting life,
When the last means for its support are gone?
Were famine not as mortal as the sword,
This warmth might be excus'd — But take thy choice:
Die how you will, you shall not die alone.

AGNES.

Nor live, I hope.

OLD WILMOT.

There is no fear of that.

AGNES.

Then, we'll live both.

OLD WILMOT.

Strange folly — where's the means?

AGNES.

The means are here — those jewels —

OLD WILMOT.

Ha! — Take heed:

Perhaps thou dost but try me — yet take heed —

There's nought so monstrous but the mind of man

In some conditions may be brought t' approve;

Theft, sacrilege, treason, and parricide,

When desperation drove, have been committed

By those who once wou'd start to hear them nam'd.

G

AGNES.

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AGNES.

And add to these detested suicide,
Which, by a crime much less, we may avoid.

OLD WILMOT.

What crime?

——Th' inhospitable murder of our guest!——
How cou'dst thou form a thought so very dreadful,
So cruel, bloody, and so full of horror?

AGNES.

'Tis less impiety, less against nature,
To take another's life, than end our own.

OLD WILMOT.

It is no matter, whether this or that
Be, in itself, the less or greater crime:
'They both are crimes, let neither be committed.——
What art thou, Agnes?

When in an hour of trial and of sufferance
Reason, thy noblest power, is thus suborned
To plead the cause of murder.

AGNES.

You're too severe: Reason may justly plead
For her own preservation. This single means
Is giv'n us to preserve our wretched beings.
His death alone gives us the means to live.

OLD WILMOT.

Urge me no more. I fear thy pow'rful influence.—
But do not tempt me farther.—Cease thee, Agnes.—
It is most true I cannot die without thee;
And, if we live, sharp penury and want
Will make life miserable.—What's to be done?

AGNES.

Nothing remains,
But the swift execution of a deed,
That is not to be thought on, or delay'd.

OLD

OLD WILMOT.

O Agnes, Agnes!
Thou'st rais'd a tort'ring conflict in my mind:
I am betray'd within! my resolution fails—
My will's subdu'd, and my whole soul's infected.—
O thou unhappy youth! say, what cou'd move thee,
To put thy life and fortune in the hands
Of wretches mad with anguish!

AGNES.

By what means?
By stabbing? suffocation? or by strangling?
Shall we effect his death?

OLD WILMOT.

I cannot! will not do it!—O thou fiend!
How cruel, how remorseless and impatient
Have pride and poverty made thee?

AGNES.

Barbarous man!
Whose wasteful riots ruin'd our estate,
And drove our son, ere the first down had spread.
His rosy cheeks, spite of my sad presages,
Earnest intreaties, agonies and tears,
To seek his bread 'mongst strangers, and to perish
In some remote, inhospitable land——
The loveliest youth, in person and in mind,
That ever crown'd a groaning mother's pains!
Where was thy pity, where thy patience then?
Thou cruel husband! thou unnat'ral father!
Thou most remorseless, most ungrateful man,
To waste my fortune, rob me of my son;
To drive me to despair, and then reproach me
For being what thou'st made me.

OLD WILMOT.

Dry thy tears :

I ought not to reproach thee. I confess

That thou hast suffer'd much :— So have we both.

But chide no more.

Thy sharp reproaches wring me to the soul.

Witness the pangs I feel,

Witness the bitter anguish of my heart,

Thy sufferings are more grievous than my own.

Then chide not, Agnes :—I'm wrought up to thy purpose.—

I'll do this deed of death—this deed of murder,—

Tho' my heart shudders,—tho' each trembling nerve

Stiffens with horror—

The poor, ill-fated victim, ere he reclin'd

Upon the fatal couch, took off the sash

And costly dagger which thou saw'st him wear,

—And thus, unthinkng, furnish'd us with arms

Against himself.—Which shall I use ?

AGNES.

The sash.

If you make use of that, I can assist.

OLD WILMOT.

No,

'Tis a dreadful office, and I'll spare

Thy trembling hands the guilt — steal to the door,

And bring me word, if he be still asleep.

[Exit. AGN.]

Or I'm deceiv'd, or he pronounc'd himself

The happiest of mankind. Unhappy wretch !

Thy thoughts are perishing, thy youthful joys,

Touch'd by the icy hand of grisly death,

Are with'ring in their bloom — But thought extinguish'd,

He'll never know the loss, nor feel the bitter

Pangs

The FATAL CURIOSITY.

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Pangs of disappointment — Then I was wrong
In counting him a wretch : To die well pleas'd,
Is all the happiest of mankind can hope for.

Why do I mourn him thus ?

To be a wretch, is to survive the loss
Of every joy, and even hope itself,
As I have done — Why do I mourn him then ?
For, by the anguish that now wrings my soul,
He's to be envy'd, if compar'd with me.

Enter AGNES, with YOUNG WILMOT's dagger

AGNES.

The stranger

Sleeps at present ; but so restless

His slumbers seem, they can't continue long.

Come, come, dispatch — Here, I've secur'd his dagger

OLD WILMOT.

Agnes! if there be a hell, 'tis just

We shou'd expect it. (*Goes to take the dagger, but let's it fall*)

AGNES.

Nay, for shame, shake off this panick, and be more
yourself.

OLD WILMOT.

How say ye — What's to be done —

What would ye have me do ?

AGNES.

You're quite dismay'd. I'll do

The deed myself. [*Takes up the dagger*]

OLD WILMOT.

Give me the fatal steel.

'Tis but a single murder,

Necessity, impatience and despair,

The three wide mouths, of that true Cerberus,

Grim poverty, demands — They shall be stopp'd.

Ambition, persecution, and revenge

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Devour their millions daily : And shall I ——
 But follow me, and see how little cause
 You had to think there was the least remains
 Of manhood, pity, mercy, or remorse
 Left in this savage breast. *[Going the wrong way.]*

AGNES.

Where do you go?
 The street is that way,

OLD WILMOT.

True ! I had forgot,

AGNES.

Quite, quite confounded.

OLD WILMOT.

Vell, I am recover'd.

—— This is the way.

AGNES.

Softly ! softly !

The least noise undoes us.

[Exit.]

—— Still I fear him :

—— No, now he seems determin'd —— O ! that pause,

That cowardly pause ! —— His resolution fails ——

It is wisely done to lift your eyes to heaven ;

When did you pray before ? I have no patience ——

How he surveys him ? What a look was there ?

How full of anguish, pity and remorse —— Ha !

—— He'll never do it —— Strike, or give it o'er ——

—— No, he recovers —— But that trembling arm

May miss its aim ; and if he fails, we're lost ——

Ha ! 'tis done —— O ! no ; he lives, he struggles yet.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Oh heav'ns ! oh mercy, mercy ! *(In another room.)*

AGNES.

Quick, repeat the blow.

What pow'r shall I invoke to aid thee, Wilmot !

Ha !

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Ha! no—Yet hold thy hand—Inconstant, wretched
My heart recoils, and I now bleed with him [woman]
Whose murder I contriv'd——O Wilmot! Wilmot!

Enter CHARLOT, MARIA, EUSTACE, RANDAL, and
others.

CHARLOT.

What strange neglect! The doors are all unbarr'd,
And not a living creature to be seen.

Enter OLD WILMOT and AGNES.

CHARLOT.

Sir, we are come to give and to receive
A thousand greetings——Where is my Wilmot?
Ha! what can this mean?——
Why do you look with such amazement on us?——
Are these your transports for your son's return?
Where is my Wilmot? Has he not been here?——
Wou'd he defer your happiness so long,
Or cou'd a habit so disguise your son,
That you refus'd to own him?

AGNES.

Heard you that?
What prodigy of horror is disclosing?

YOUNG WILMOT.

(Groans) Oh! oh! oh!

EUSTACE.

Sure that deep groan came from the inner room.

RANDAL.

It did; and seem'd the voice of one expiring,
Merciful heaven! where will these terrors end?
That is the dagger my young master wore;
And see, his father's hand are stain'd with blood.

[YOUNG WILMOT groans again.

RANDAL

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RANDAL.

Another groan ! Why do we stand to gaze
On these dumb phantoms of despair and horror ?
Let us search farther.

[*Exeunt* CHARLOT, MARIA, EUSTACE,
RANDAL, &c.

AGNES.

Let life forsake the earth, and light the sun,
And death and darkness bury in oblivion
Mankind and all their deeds, that no posterity
May ever rise to hear our horrid tale,
Or view the grave of such detested paricides.

OLD WILMOT.

Curse and deprecations are in vain :
The sun will shine, and all things have their course.
When we, the curse and burthen of the earth,
Shall be absorb'd and mingled with its dust.
Our guilt and desolation must be told,
From age to age, to teach desponding mortals,
How far beyond the reach of human thought
Heaven, when incens'd, can punish—Take this.

I need not bid thee use it now.

[*Gives a dagger.*

Death now has lost its terror.

AGNES.

Ever kind,

But most in this. —

[*Stabs herself.*

OLD WILMOT.

I will not long survive thee.

AGNES.

Do not accuse thy erring mother, Wilmot !
With too much rigour when we meet above.
Rivers of tears, and ages spent in howling
Cou'd ne'er express the anguish of my heart.

To

THE FATAL CURIOSITY.

To give thee life for life, and blood for blood,
Is not enough. Had I ten thousand lives,
I'd give them all to speak my patience
Deep—and sincere—and equal to my crime.

[D]

Enter RANDAL and EUSTACE.

EUSTACE.

Unhappy Charlot ! This strange event my strength
Can scarce support ; no wonder thine should fail
—How shall I vent my grief ?

RANDAL.

O Wilmot ! Wilmot ! thou unhappy youth !
Thou truest lover, and thou best of friends,
Are these the fruits of all thy anxious cares
For thy ungrateful parents ? — Cruel fiends !
To use thee thus ! — To recompence with death
Thy most unequal'd duty and affection !

OLD WILMOT.

What whining fool art thou, who would'st usurp
My sovereign right of grief ? — Was he thy son ? —
Say ! Canst thou shew thy hands reeking with blood,
With a son's blood.

Compute the sands that bound the spacious ocean,
And swell their number with a single grain ;
Encrease the noise of thunder with thy voice ;
Or when the raging wind lays nature waste,
Assist the tempest with thy feeble breath ;
Add water to the sea, and fire to Ætna ;
But name not thy faint sorrow with the anguish
Of a curst wretch who only hopes for this

(*Stabbing himself*)

To change the scene, but not relieve his pain.

RANDAL.

A dreadful instance of the last remorse !
May all your woes end here.

H

O

The FATAL CURIOSITY.

OLD WILMOT.

wou'd they end
thousand ages hence, I then should suffer
much less than I deserve. Yet let me say,
you'll do but justice, to inform the world,
his horrid deed, that punishes itself,
was not intended as he was our son,
or that we knew not, 'till it was too late,
proud and impatient under afflictions,
While heaven was labouring to make us happy,
We brought this dreadful ruin on ourselves.
Mankind may learn——but——oh!

[Dies.]

RANDAL.

He most will not :
Let us at least be wiser, nor complain
Of heaven's mysterious ways, and awful reign :
By our bold censures we invade his throne
Who made mankind, and governs but his own :
Who's youthful Wilmot's sun be set ere noon,
The ripe in virtue never die too soon.



F I N I S.



